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Men, Women and Children for Sale: The Dichotomy of Human Trafficking in the United States and Abroad

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Men, Women and Children for Sale: The Dichotomy of Human Trafficking in the United States and Abroad

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Professor Paul Brown, *Faculty Mentor* (Department of Anthropology)

Living in Thailand in 2005 opened my eyes to the real plight of exploited peoples around the world. I was able to experience first-hand the economic and social issues facing potential victims of human trafficking. According to Anti-Slavery International, there are an estimated 200 million people being held in slavery worldwide. Approximately 800,000 people per year are being trafficked across international borders and forced into slavery. Like most Americans, I believed this is a horrible problem facing only people of developing countries. Last year I heard Chong Kim describe her traumatizing experience of being trafficked within the United States. Over 45,000 people are trafficked into the United States yearly for exploitation. In this paper, I will discuss the issue of human trafficking, explain how trafficking affects different countries, including the United States, and address how a holistic, well-rounded approach is needed to stop this global problem on all fronts.

Introduction

When most people hear the word slavery, they think of a brutal era in the history of the United States and the world. Slavery occurred during a time of blunt racism and great inhumanity. It could never happen in this time of non-governmental human rights organizations and great equality. This perception is, however, false. Slavery, now known as human trafficking, is as rampant today as it was during the colonial period. According to the 2006 Trafficking in Persons Report (TIP) issued by the United States Department of State, human trafficking is “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.”¹ The report states that approximately 80,000 people are trafficked world-wide, while at least 45,000 victims are being trafficked into the United States. This number does not include the number of people being held in slavery in their origin countries, which by some estimates, is over 200 million. Obviously, slavery, though under a different name, is still occurring all over the world, including the United States.

In 2005, I spent one year in Thailand. It was there that I became aware of human trafficking and the extreme desperation that makes migration for employment not only appealing, but necessary. By all means, no one wishes to be a victim of slavery or exploitation; however, many traffickers recruit victims through coercion. Promises of a better life and more money make strange offers of employment an easy answer. This is only one of many tactics used by traffickers to recruit victims, as I will discuss some other further below.

¹ US Department of State. 2006 Trafficking in Persons Annual Report.

When I came home to Minnesota in 2006, I knew that I wanted to focus my studies on eliminating this epidemic, which I thought was confined to the developing world. As open as I was, even I could not believe that something like this could ever happen in my country. In my mind, slavery could never occur in a country like United States where affirmative action and nonracist policies are working hard to right the wrongs made in the past. The United States is a land of equality and human rights and such abominations could only happen in a less humane world. I was wrong. In the fall of 2006, Chong Kim, now the Executive Director of Minorities and Survivors Improving Empowerment (MASIE) came to Minnesota State University, Mankato and shared her traumatizing experience of being trafficked in the United States as a United States citizen. Her presentation opened my eyes to the fact that human trafficking was not just a problem of the developing world; it is also happening here. Though the United States is primarily a destination country for victims of human trafficking, a thorough understanding of both the supply and the demand factors is needed to properly address this modern international form of slavery. In this report, I will outline what human trafficking is and who it is affecting worldwide. Also, I will briefly share Chong Kim's experience being trafficked in the United States, as well as other stories of trafficking around the world. Lastly, I will discuss some of the current methods for dealing with human trafficking and explain needs to be done to combat this modern form of exploitation and slavery.

Human Trafficking in Brief

As stated above, human trafficking is the recruitment and transfer of a victim in order to exploit them in any way possible. Most victims of human trafficking are treated as immigration violators and are often penalized and deported. The reason for this is the lack of knowledge about human trafficking and its confusion with smuggling. Human trafficking and smuggling appear to be very similar, however, they differ in one important aspect; the use of deception. This deception can be during the recruitment, transfer, or destination steps; however, it is the defining characteristic of human trafficking. Smuggling, while it does involve recruitment and transportation, often ends at the destination country and the migrant is left to fend for his or herself. With human trafficking, the exploitation tends to carry on past the point of destination in the form of forced labor or prostitution. In this way, a process that could have begun as smuggling (someone paid to be transported to another country in hopes of a better opportunity) could turn to human trafficking (once they arrive in the country, the contract is broken and the victim is continuously exploited). It is due to this confusion that most victims are treated as criminals.

It is very difficult to estimate the number of victims of human trafficking in the world today for two reasons. First, very nature of the crime makes estimation nearly impossible. Also, victims are very reluctant to come forward about their experiences for various reasons, including guilt, embarrassment, and threats to themselves or their families made by the trafficker. Even so, the United Nations Department of Drugs and Crime estimates that over 800,000 are trafficked for exploitation world-wide and over 45,000 are trafficked to the United States.² This number does not reflect the number of slavery victims held captive within their native countries. Approximately 70 percent of people trafficked world-wide are female, while over half are

² United Nations Department of Drugs and Crime. *Toolkit to Combat Trafficking in Persons*. 2006

children. Currently, human trafficking generates over 12 billion USD annually and is now in competition with drugs and arms trafficking as the biggest criminal profit maker. It is closely related to other forms of organized criminal activities. For this reason, human trafficking and its international policies are handled by the United Nations Department of Drugs and Crime (see above). The money generated from this exploitation is used to fuel even more illegal activities.

Causes of Human Trafficking

There is no single cause of the occurrences of human trafficking. In the book, *Trafficking in Women and Children: Current Issues and Developments*, Francis T. Miko lists the causes of human trafficking as follows; (1) continuing subordination of women in many societies; (2) hardship and economic dislocation in various countries; (3) high demand for trafficked victims; (4) inadequacy of laws and law enforcement in most countries; (5) priority placed on stemming illegal immigration; and (6) disinterest and sometime complicity of governments in some countries.³ Some developing countries still view women as inferior. For example, in Thailand, though some women become nuns, they are viewed as lay people because women cannot become monks. In Thai society, the males earn merit for their families by becoming a monk in their early adult life. Since women are not afforded this opportunity, most feel it necessary to earn money for their family. This influences their decisions for employment. Also, women statistically earn less than men world-wide for the same work (approximately 70-72 percent according to Linda Levine, a specialist in Labor Economics in the Domestic Social Policy Division of the United States Congress⁴). This increases the appeal of migration for employment. Hardship and economic dislocation in various countries also increases this appeal for movement. Currently there are over 50 million displaced people in the world.⁵ These refugees are not only desperate for employment and opportunity, but are also easily forgotten.

Another cause of human trafficking and a main reason why it is so difficult to suppress is its high demand world-wide. As globalization and capitalism compete to drive down the cost of products, the demand for cheap labor rises. Human trafficking is a major source of inexpensive labor, and unlike most other commodities, humans can be exploited time and time again.

Many countries still have no specific laws to combat human trafficking, though many have related laws such as involuntary imprisonment, kidnapping, and exploitation. Slowly countries are realizing that human trafficking is a global epidemic and are refining their laws. Also, the United Nations and the United States are threatening sanctions on countries that are not combating human trafficking, as I will further explain below.

³ Troubnikoff, Anna M. ed. *Trafficking in Women and Children: Current Issues and Developments*. Nova Science Publishers Inc. New York. 2003

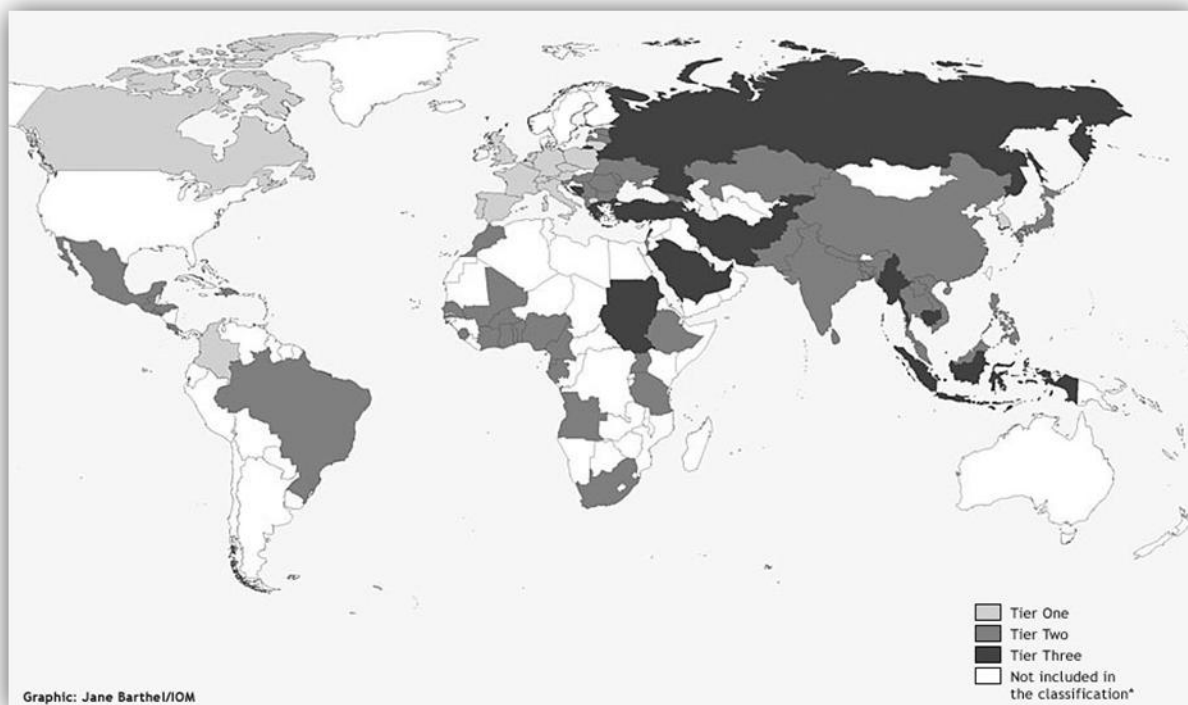
⁴ Levine, Linda. 95-661: *The Male-Female Wage Gap: A Fact Sheet*. Report to Congress. 2000. Electronic document. Retrieved June 13, 2007. <http://www.ncseonline.org/nle/crsreports/economics/econ-65.cfm?&CFID=3106828&CFTOKEN=69609068>

⁵ Bales, Kevin. *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy*. University of California Press. Berkeley. 2004

As I stated above, most victims of human trafficking are treated as immigration violators because of the increased need to stem illegal immigration. After the events of September 11th, 2001, most countries, and the United States especially, have tightened their suspicions of and their borders to foreigners. With the language barriers that often exist between law enforcement officials and the victims, it is often difficult to assess the nature of the incident. Even worse, some governments and officials actually help to facilitate human trafficking by issuing false identification, allowing passage through international borders, and sometimes, even recruiting new victims. Many traffickers threaten their victims, telling them that the police will only return them to the trafficker if they escape. Sadly, this is often true, and is a main reason why victims are afraid to tell their story and press charges against their traffickers.

2006 Trafficking in Persons Annual Report

Every year, the United States Department of State produces a report on human trafficking domestic and abroad. The report defines what consists of human trafficking as well as identifies which countries are working to combat human trafficking. ***Countries in the report are placed in three different tiers. Tier 1 countries are those whose governments fully comply with the Trafficking Victims Protection Act's (TVPA) minimum standards. The TVPA is an annual report created by the United Nations Drugs and Crime Division, citing ways to fight human trafficking. Tier 2 countries are those whose governments do not fully comply with the Act's minimum standards, but are actively making efforts to bring themselves into compliance. Those countries listed as Tier 3 are countries whose governments do not fully comply with the Act's minimum standards and are not making significant efforts to do so. These countries are now being threatened with sanctions, not only from the United States, but also from the United Nations. Below is a map identifying those countries listed in the Trafficking in Persons Report.***



For a complete list of countries, see Appendix 1.

Human Trafficking in the United States

As you can see, the US Department of State does not list the United States in its tier system. Here, I will briefly discuss some incidents of human trafficking within this country, including the story of Chong Kim.

Approximately every ten minutes, a man, woman, or child is trafficking to or within the United States⁶. There are various reasons for the demand of trafficked people in the United States, and those include prostitution, forced labor, adoption, and the removal of organs. According to the CIA, the average age of prostitution in this country is 13. Trafficking is often overlooked in the United States because it is associated with illegal immigration or prostitution. Since both are crimes, and involve victims of trafficking, these victims are viewed as criminals.

During my research, I found many articles related to human trafficking in the United States. Some are as follows:

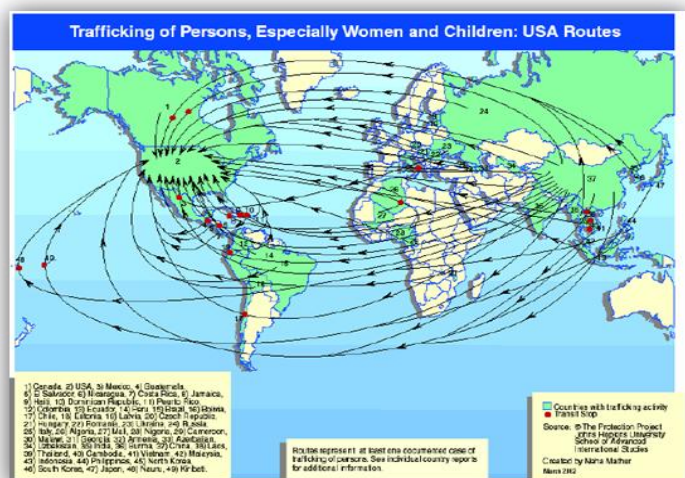
August 18th, 2006 – The York Dispatch reports that 20 brothels in seven states were raided by FBI and immigration officials that week. The brothels allegedly held smuggled Korean women against their will and forced them into prostitution.

August 11th, 2006 – The Associated Press reports that after a two year investigation in Seattle, WA, nine people have been arrested for their involvement in an international sex-trafficking ring that smuggled Asian women into the US in shipping containers.

August 4th, 2006 – The Star-Ledger reported that in Trenton, NJ, two Honduran women admitted to smuggling dozens of illegal female immigrants into the United States and forcing them to work in bars. The women admitted to overseeing dozens of illegal Hondurans, some as young as 14, who were forced to work in order to repay debts accumulated from smuggling.

These articles were retrieved from the American Anti-Slavery Group iAbolish and their website⁷. These are just a few of the hundreds of cases of human trafficking within the United States, and this was just one week in August of last year. There are so many that it would be impossible to list them all in one report.

This map displays some of the routes that traffickers use to transport victims to the United States. The red dots indicate transit stops between the origin and destination countries. As you can see,



⁶Commission on the Status of Women. *Human Trafficking and Child Prostitution Task Force Report*. Electronic document. Retrieved June 13, 2007.

http://www.lacity.org/csw/publications/cswpublications265139830_08112006.pdf

⁷Slavery in the News. iAbolish American Anti-Slavery Group. Electronic resource. http://www.iabolish.org/slavery_today/news/index.html. Retrieved April 15, 2007

even with the heightened security in the United States, trafficking is still a major issue in this country.

Chong Kim and Her Experience Being Trafficked in the United States

Chong Kim moved to the United States with her parents in 1975 when she was just two years old. She was raised in Texas, went to an American high school, and speaks English perfectly. Although she was raised in the United States, Kim still was raised in a strict, even abusive, Asian household. She was abused by her parents and not allowed to have many friends, especially not male friends. At the age of 19 she had her first boyfriend, a military man. After dating for a couple of months, this man kidnapped Kim, chained her up in the basement of his house, and took away all of her documents. He threatened her, telling her that if she left, she would get treated like an illegal alien and not have any of her rights. He told her that Asian women like her were the downfall of military men like him. She didn't believe him, and knew that she needed to escape.

When she finally escaped, her worst fears were realized, this man was right. She was treated as a foreigner without any documents. She could not find a homeless shelter that would allow her to stay without papers. She was treated like an illegal immigrant in the country she was raised in. During this time, a woman approached her about a job opportunity in Las Vegas. She was told that she would become an escort, and her situation made her desperate. Though in one sense, she had agreed to be a prostitute, she did not agree to the treatment that she would receive.

She met up with this woman in a parking lot to be taken to her destination. There she was blindfolded, tied up and locked in the back of a van with many other women. At her destination, women were being forced to service up to 35 men a day. At first she resisted, but the traffickers used brutal means to convince her to work. She had made friends with a 12 year old girl there, and had been taking care of her. Her traffickers took the girl, and made Kim watch as she was gang-raped by several men. Kim quickly agreed to work. During her four years in the human trafficking ring, she was transported all over the United States. In this way, her traffickers could stay under the radar of law enforcement.

Luckily, Chong Kim was able to escape from trafficking at the age of 23 when one of her clients purchased her. Now, at 31, she continues the fight against slavery, even here in Minnesota. Her organization, Minorities and Survivors Improving Empowerment, is based out of Bloomington, MN, and is working hard to educate others about human trafficking as well as assist victims of human trafficking.

How to Combat Human Trafficking?

Human trafficking is just now being understood as a global threat to human rights. While we are making strides to indentifying the crime, there are still many ways in which to help protect victims of trafficking, better prosecute the perpetrators of this crime, and work to prevent trafficking from occurring. Listed below are some steps that, in my opinion, need to be taken to combat this new global slavery. While it is much easier to focus on one or a few of these areas, a holistic approach is needed to better understand and end human trafficking.

The improvement of social, economic and educational assistance and condition in source countries is needed in order to diminish the attraction of migration. In some countries, there are no better educational or career opportunities for many poor residents, especially women. Migration for employment, any kind of employment, may be seen as the only option for these people. It is very easy for desperate people to be exploited.

Also, the penalties for those convicted of human trafficking must be harsher to deter people from participating in the recruitment or exploitation of trafficked people. Many people involved in human trafficking are attracted by the low-cost and high-yield of trafficked victims. Typically, penalties for human trafficking and other related crimes are much lower than those for drugs and arms smuggling. With the emergence of the TVPA and a new division of Civil Rights Enforcement specially created for human trafficking, we are finally taking steps to have a universal definition of human trafficking, as well as ways to prosecute traffickers, protect victims, and prevent trafficking.

An important step in the right direction is to educate the law enforcement and general public on preventing trafficking and identifying victims of trafficking. Bring this issue to light can decrease to ease at which human traffickers operate.

Everyone in the world should work towards stopping the demand for slavery and the products of slavery, including prostitution and sweatshop products. The public should have an understanding of where their products come from and how they came to be. Also, companies and employees need to be monitored to insure employment rights.

Lastly, rehabilitation for victims must be locally and personally based. Not all victims go through the same experiences, and most do not like to discuss their experiences openly. Through rehabilitation and counseling, we can hopefully get a better picture of the process of human trafficking as well as prosecute the traffickers. This is only a short list of things needed to be done to start to combat this issue however; this will be a slow journey to a much needed end.

During my research, I learned more of the real danger of human trafficking as well as how it is a global plague. By listening to the Chong Kim's presentation, I realized that human trafficking was not just an issue abroad, but also in this country. In this article, I briefly discussed what human trafficking is according to the 2006 Trafficking in Persons Annual Report, identified instances of human trafficking in the United States including that of Chong Kim, and outlined some of the steps necessary to combat human trafficking. I hope I have educated you all on the very real plight of victims of human trafficking as well inform you that this form of slavery is occurring right outside our doors.

Elizabeth Kolbe (Anthropology)

Elizabeth Kolbe is a native of Sleepy Eye, Minnesota, and graduated from Sleepy Eye Public High School in 2002. She is a senior at Minnesota State University, Mankato and her expected graduation date is December of 2007. She is majoring in Anthropology with minors in Ethnic Studies and Spanish. In 2005, she studied abroad in her mother's home country of Thailand for one year. There she was a volunteer English teacher in a small village in central Thailand. It was there that she first experienced extreme poverty and human trafficking. Since then, she has devoted much of her time try to understand human trafficking. She believes that together, we can end this global epidemic.

Dr. Paul Brown, Faculty Mentor (Anthropology Chair)

Dr. Paul Brown is currently Professor and Chair of the Department of Anthropology at Minnesota State, Mankato, where he has been a member of the faculty since 1980. A native of Los Angeles, Dr. Brown did his undergraduate work at California State University, Northridge, and his M.A. and Ph.D. at the University of Colorado at Boulder. His research and publications focus on skeletal biology, human adaptation and sociobiology, and evolutionary theory. He has received a number of honors and awards for his work, including Teacher of the Year, Fulbright Visiting Scholar, and the Frontier Forum Lectureship.

Appendix 1: 2006 Trafficking in Persons Annual Report Country Tier List

| Tier 1 Countries | Tier 2 Countries | Tier 3 Countries |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Australia | Afghanistan | Belize |
| France | East Timor | Iran |
| Malawi | Latvia | Saudi Arabia |
| South Korea | Rwanda | Uzbekistan |
| Belgium | Albania | Burma |
| Hong Kong | Ecuador | Laos |
| The Netherlands | Lebanon | Sudan |
| Sweden | Senegal | Venezuela |
| Canada | Angola | Cuba |
| Ireland | El Salvador | North Korea |
| New Zealand | Macedonia | Syria |
| Switzerland | Serbia-Montenegro | Zimbabwe |
| Colombia | Azerbaijan | |
| Italy | Estonia | |
| Norway | Madagascar | |
| United Kingdom | Sierra Leone | |
| Denmark | Bangladesh | |
| Lithuania | Ethiopia | |
| Poland | Mali | |
| Finland | Slovak Republic | |
| Luxembourg | Belarus | |
| Singapore | Gabon | |
| | Malta | |
| | Slovenia | |
| | Benin | |
| | The Gambia | |
| | Mauritius | |
| | Sri Lanka | |
| | Bosnia/Herz. | |
| | Georgia | |
| | Moldova | |
| | Surinam | |
| | Bulgaria | |
| | Ghana | |
| | Mongolia | |
| | Tajikistan | |
| | Burkina Faso | |
| | Greece | |
| | Mozambique | |
| | Tanzania | |
| | Burundi | |
| | Guatemala | |
| | Nepal | |
| | Thailand | |
| | Cameroon | |
| | Guinea | |
| | Nicaragua | |

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|--|--------------------|
| | Tunisia |
| | Chad |
| | Guinea-Bissau |
| | Niger |
| | Turkey |
| | Chile |
| | Guana |
| | Nigeria |
| | Uganda |
| | Congo (DRC) |
| | Honduras |
| | Pakistan |
| | Ukraine |
| | Costa Rica |
| | Hungary |
| | Panama |
| | Uruguay |
| | Cote D'Ivoire |
| | Japan |
| | Paraguay |
| | Vietnam |
| | Croatia |
| | Jordan |
| | Philippines |
| | Czech Republic |
| | Kazakhstan |
| | Portugal |
| | Zambia |
| | Dominican Republic |
| | Kyrgyz Republic |
| | Romania |
| | Yemen |

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